DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 468 259 SP 041 019

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TITLE Gender Differences in Disciplinary Approaches.
PUB DATE 2002-00-00
NOTE 16p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; *Discipline; Elementary Education; *Gender Issues; *Sex Differences; Student Behavior; Teacher Behavior; Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This study explored differences in disciplinary approaches of male and female teachers toward male and female children, examining the connection between educator's gender and method of disciplining urban, elementary school aged children. Participants were 20 New York State certified and licensed teachers in two elementary schools. Teacher surveys contained eight behavioral scenarios (four scenarios with boys and four with girls). The scenarios ranged from least to most problematic and were listed in random order. Each scenario question provided a situation in which an educator could react in order to discipline the student involved. Responses for each scenario were listed in random order and ranged from most assertive to least assertive disciplinary action. Data analysis indicated that although there were many similarities between male and female teachers' discipline responses, male teachers were more likely to select a more aggressive disciplinary approach toward boys. More of both the male and female teachers opted to not acknowledge boys' behavior than that of girls when the child's behavior was not aggressive. Female teachers were slightly more consistent with their disciplinary responses for both boys and girls. (SM)

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2002

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Gender Differences in Disciplinary Approaches

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ABSTRACT

Educators often find themselves in situations with young children that may or may not require a form of discipline implemented. In order to impose and sustain order in a large group classroom environment, teachers may find it complex to implement the appropriate form of discipline successfully. The level of complexity may increase when incorporating different genders within the classroom. The purpose of this article is to explore the differences in disciplinary approaches of male and female teachers toward male and female children. This study looks at the connection between educators' gender and methods of disciplining male and female elementary school aged children in an urban setting. It has been demonstrated that although many similarities were found between female and male educators' discipline responses, male teachers were more likely to select a more aggressive disciplinary approach toward boys. More of both the female and male teachers opted to not acknowledge boys' behavior than that of girls' when the child's behavior was not aggressive. Female teachers were slightly more consistent with their disciplinary responses for both boys and girls.

Introduction

The term ***discipline*** is defined as to train or develop by instruction and exercise especially in self-control; to bring (a group) under control; to impose order upon (Merriam Webster's Dictionary). When interacting with young children, there are often a variety of methods that may be used to discipline the child when deemed necessary by an adult. Depending on the situation, offense committed by the child, and perception of the offense by the adult, the outcome of discipline may vary greatly.

Educators often find themselves in situations with young children that may or may not require a form of discipline implemented. In order to impose and sustain order in a large group classroom environment, teachers may find it complex to identify an offensive or negative situation, assess the situation, decide the manner in which the offense should be handled, and implement the appropriate form of discipline successfully. The level of complexity may increase when incorporating different genders within the classroom. "Research results, generally, suggest that boys tend to have higher prevalence rates of behavior problems than girls. Boys problems are, especially, associated with aggressive, acting-out, conduct disorders and social maladjustment, while prevalence figures of withdrawn and neurotic behaviors are almost always the same for boys and girls, although girls show a slight excess" (Papatheodorou & Ramasut, 1993, p. 5).

The purpose of this article is to explore the differences in disciplinary approaches of male and female teachers toward male and female children. The study will look at the connection between educators' gender and methods of disciplining male and female elementary school aged children.

Educators and Discipline

When discussing methods of discipline in relation to young children's behavior, educators' responses vary a great deal. Some individuals believe strongly in a structured form of discipline. Others lean toward a more open approach to discipline in which the child develops an understanding of the inappropriateness of his/her behavior. Others still, may advocate a

particular form of discipline in the home and another form in a school setting. The variations become more elaborate as the individuals' occupation and personal experiences differ, such as with educators. The underlying commonality is often the understanding that children should be cared for and disciplined in order to develop successfully into adulthood. The term "successfully" may mean an array of different meanings to all educators. What exactly defines a successful adult in regards to discipline? Is it one who conforms to social norms? Is it an individual that upholds rules and regulations or a person that will honor basic human rights (DeVries & Zan)?

The question to ask is are we, as educators, implementing forms of discipline that will help develop our children into "successful" adults in our society, and are we imparting the discipline in a uniform manner to both girls and boys alike?

Implementation of Discipline

"Gender issues underlie numerous classroom activities...yet teachers have differing views of the position they should take in this matter" (Singh, 1998, p. 2). The opinions of each educator permeate their behavior and responses toward children. Hesitation and uncertainty when dealing with an issue in a classroom is also a response that children are capable of understanding. It has been my experience, when identifying a specific situation, a teacher assesses and decides on the manner in which the situation should be handled and finally implements the appropriate form of discipline. These steps teachers undergo are not predetermined nor can they be researched and studied. The ways in which female and male

educators handle distinct discipline situations are relative to personal experiences, beliefs, and personality traits.

Gender-Roles and Educators

There have been a variety of studies written on the role of gender and its part in the process of education. One such study (Lasonen, 1991) identified gender-role attitudes of Finnish vocational teachers. "The major finding identified by this research was that gender accounted for the greatest amount of variance in the gender-role attitudes of teachers...Finnish vocational teachers' gender-role attitudes tended to parallel those of American vocational teachers" (Lasonen, 1991, p. 7). In this study, patterns among male teachers were associated with gender segregated division of labor, whereas females' perceived gender roles as compatible with progressive equity policies. A prominent focus of this particular study was incorporating and promoting gender-equity content into the teachers' in-service training programs in Finland. "Teachers and administrators might need retraining in more gender-equitable teaching and in the awareness of their nonverbal behavior that can contribute to less gender-biased schools and workplaces" (Lasonen, 1991, p. 7).

The nonverbal behavior mentioned is an important focal point in regards to methods of teaching and implementation of discipline. Teachers relay much information through the use of nonverbal cues and behavior. In the study of Finnish vocational teachers, the gender-role biases were relayed to students through the use of nonverbal behavior. The teachers' beliefs were imparted to the students in this manner.

Throughout my experiences as an educator, when disciplining young children, I have found that an educators' actions relay messages to their students just as well as their verbal remarks.

Male vs. Female: Claims and Beliefs

Many educators have documented their opinions and beliefs with regard to the benefits of male teachers educating boys. Many of these claims and theories have been noted as being stereotypical and is reviewed and refuted within Gold and Reis' (1978) study, on the benefits of male teachers educating boys. "Female teachers cannot teach boys as well as male teachers...[male teachers] are thought to be better able to deal with boys' presumably more active behavior in the classroom and also to aid boys in achieving masculine sex identity" (Gold & Reis, 1978, p. 3). The claims made by educators throughout literature have implicated that teachers have preferences and biases based on gender and have the capability to exude those preferences in their daily interactions with students. "Some educators have argued that female teachers favor girls...Goebes and Shore, for example, found that teachers considered girls to be closer to the ideal than boys on a sloppy-neat continuum, as well as closer to the ideal on other preferred qualities" (p. 4). When discussing the impact of male teachers on male students and the alterations to the environment male teachers would offer in fostering better development of boys; this study finds the difference between male and female teachers limited and gives a detailed explanation. "Only one of the reviewed studies of early elementary school children provided significant or unconfounded positive findings. In later elementary grades, male

teachers may positively influence boys' masculine sex-role preference...overall, few findings indicate that the presence of male teachers provides significant and important benefits" (p. 1).

Explanation of Survey

Throughout my years teaching, the topic of discipline and gender has been raised and it has become one of interest to me. Often throughout discussions both with educators and parents, I have encountered stereotypes regarding male and female teachers and ways in which they discipline. Parents of school children, educators, and adults reflecting on their years in school, all have a distinct perception of the differences between male and female teachers. I have been interested to learn whether these perceptions and stereotypes hold any validity.

A total of twenty New York State Certified and licensed teachers in two elementary schools were surveyed. The schools contain grades Kindergarten through six and are located in an urban neighborhood in The Bronx, New York. An equal number of female and male teachers were selected, at random, to participate in this survey (the teachers surveyed were required to have taught in a classroom setting rather than Cluster position or Gym teachers, at some point in their career).

The survey contained eight behavioral scenarios (four scenarios included boys and four included girls). The behavioral scenarios ranged from least problematic to most problematic and were listed in random order. Responses for each scenario were also listed in random order and ranged from most assertive disciplinary action to the least assertive disciplinary action.

Each scenario question on the survey conducted, provided a situation in which an educator may react in order to discipline the student involved. Scenario question one involves a male student that shouts out an answer before raising his hand in class. Each scenario's situation and student gender (via name) is listed in the chart below.

Scenario Question	Scenario (Gender- specific/name)
1	Greg shouts an answer without raising his hand.
2	Carol kicks another student during a lesson in class.
3	Alysha completes class work and begins writing in her book.
4	Michael pulls and tears another student's shirt.
5	David interrupts to ask for water.
6	Leslie talks and whispers during a lesson in class.
7	Elizabeth interrupts to ask to go to the bathroom.
8	Joshua completes his work and begins to help another student.

Each survey response ranged from most assertive disciplinary action to the least assertive disciplinary action and was listed in random order. Responses were consistent for each question and are as follows:

Responses Ranked Most assertive disciplinary action to Least Assertive Disciplinary Action (1-5)

2 *[a] Yell at the student*
5 *[b] Do not acknowledge the behavior and continue*
1 *[c] Physically restrain the student*
3 *[d] Talk with the student (1 on 1)*
4 *[e] Separate the student from others*
[f] Other (please explain):_____

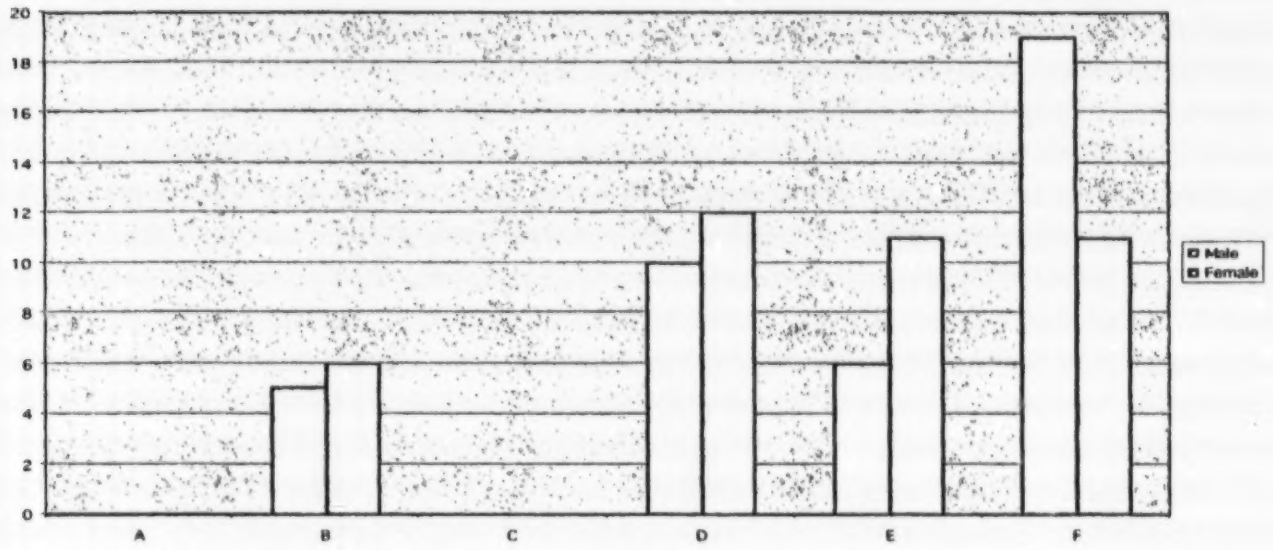
Numbers have been assigned to each letter response in order to rank from most assertive disciplinary action to the least assertive disciplinary action (1-5).

What the Survey Showed

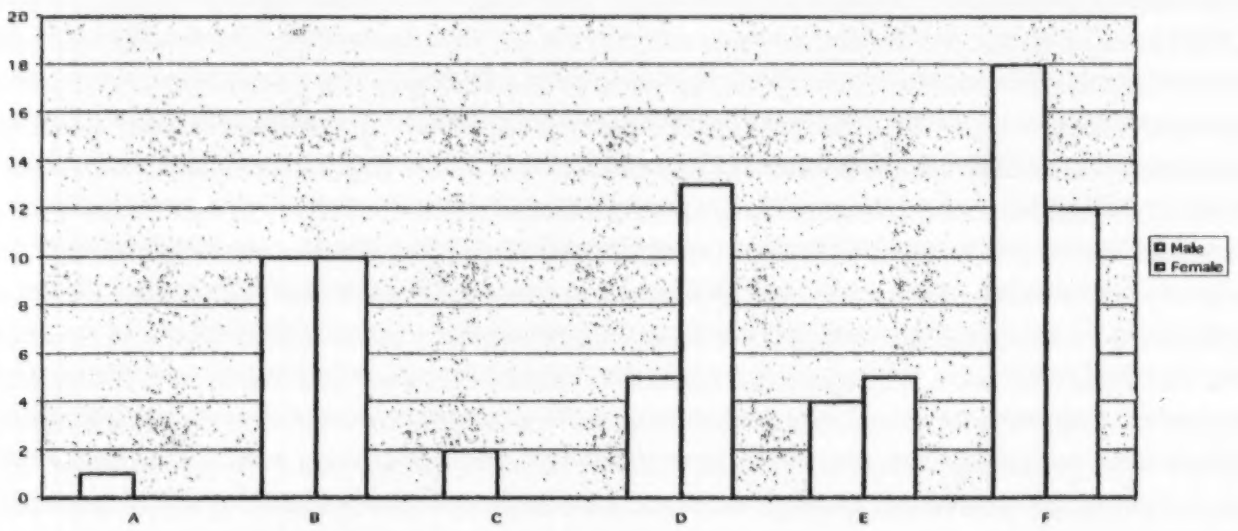
The bar graphs below explain the trends found throughout the survey in participants' responses regarding gender differences in disciplinary approaches. Of the eight behavioral scenario questions, four scenarios pertained to female students. Listed along the x-axis of this graph, are all the possible letter responses for the survey. The y-axis depicts the percentage of teacher participants (male and female).

In this graph we can see that 25% of the male teachers and 30% of female teachers responded *[b] Do not acknowledge the behavior* toward female students. We can also see that 50% of the male teachers and 60% of the female teachers as a disciplinary response toward girls, selected choice [d] Talk with the student (1 on 1); while no teachers selected choices *[a] Yell at the student*, or *[c] Physically restrain the student.*

Male and Female Survey Responses to Female Students



Male and Female Survey Responses to Male Students



Similar to the previous graph, this bar graph represents the responses toward the four behavioral scenario questions that pertained to male students. When comparing the two graphs, we can see that no male or female teachers selected choice *[a] Yell at the student* when responding to girls in class; however, 5% of the male teachers selected *[a]* when disciplining boys. We can also see that while 25% of the male teachers and 30% of female teachers responded *[b] Do not acknowledge the behavior* toward female students; 50% male and 50% female teachers responded *[b]* when disciplining male students. With regard to choice [c] *Physically restrain the student*, no male or female teachers selected this choice as a response to girls, 10% of the male teachers selected this choice toward boys. When looking to the male students' graph, we can see that 25% of male teachers and 65% of female teachers selected choice *[d]*. Choice *[e]* involved *separating the student from others* as a disciplinary measure. For female students, 30% of male teachers and 55% of female teachers chose *[e]*. When responding to male students, 20% male teachers and 25% female teachers chose to separate boys from others.

Choice *[f] Other* included a variety of answers from both male and female survey participants. Some teachers combined other choices and explained why they felt that way, while others explained their rules and regulations regarding situations such as bathroom breaks in class. Some educators explained the regulations they must follow according to individual school policies. On the female student graph, we see 95% male teachers and 55% female teachers opted for choice *[f]*. On the male student graph, 90% male and 60% female teachers selected *[f]*.

Patterns and Trends

When responding to the scenarios involving female elementary students, none of the male and female teachers selected **[a]** ***Yell at the student*** or **[c]** ***Physically restrain the student.***

When responding to the scenarios involving male elementary students, 5% of the male teachers selected **[a]** ***Yell at the student.*** Two male teachers responded **[c]** ***Physically restrain the student*** as their responses. These responses are ranked as the two most assertive responses for disciplinary action. None of the female teachers selected these two choices as their response for any of the scenario questions involving male students.

The least assertive choice in the ranking is **[b]** ***Do not acknowledge the behavior and continue***. One trend that is seen with regard to this choice is the amount of male and female teachers that selected this disciplinary action as their response toward male students as compared to female students. As stated, 50% of the male teachers and 50% of female teachers selected not to acknowledge the male students' behavior and continue their lesson or routine. In response to female students, only 25% male teachers and 30% female teachers selected this choice. This information leads the reader to understand that these particular educators choose to ignore boys' behavior more so than that of girls. The male teachers selected **[d]** ***Talk with the student (1 on1)*** with female students more often than with male students. Female educators selected this choice with similar frequency for both genders of students. More female students were disciplined by separating from others [e], than male students by both male and female teachers. Through this data, it seems that boys' discipline is not dealt with as immediately as the discipline of girls

during a disciplinary scenario. The male students are more often not acknowledged until the behavior becomes aggressive. In the instance of aggression, such as in scenario question #4 in which Michael pulls and tears another student's shirt, 5% of the male educators chose the most aggressive disciplinary action of physically restraining the male student.

It has been demonstrated that although many similarities were found between female and male educators' discipline responses, male teachers were more likely to select a more aggressive disciplinary approach toward boys. More of both the female and male teachers opted to not acknowledge boys' behavior than that of girls' when the child's behavior was not aggressive. Female teachers were slightly more consistent with their disciplinary responses for both boys and girls.

Conclusion

The variety of methods that may be used to discipline a student when deemed necessary by an educator often depends on the situation, offense committed by the child, and perception of the offense by the adult, the outcome of discipline may vary greatly. Each educator has different perceptions of students based on prior experiences. The dynamics of a class or school as a whole, may also play a large role in the ways an educator implements discipline as seen in the large amount of survey participants that selected option *[f] Other*.

The situations with young children, in which educators often find themselves, may or may not require a form of discipline implemented. The ways in which discipline is implemented for both male students and female students is the topic at hand, one that requires more attention

and consistency. As Lasonen suggested, "Teachers and administrators might need retraining in more gender-equitable teaching" (Lasonen, 1991, p. 7).

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(Rev. 6/96)